



## Press Clipping Article

**Title:** Program to help farmers get Internet access

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**Lead:**

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It's been said that access to high-speed Internet is crucial for business and economic development. But one of Kentucky's largest industries, agriculture, has very limited Internet access.

Kentucky farmers rank last among the states for access to the Internet, according to a 2005 report by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Only 30 percent of the state's farmers had Internet access at the time of the study.

In the Owensboro region, the number of farmers with Internet access fits the national average.

In Hancock County, most farmers don't have Internet access, said Diane Perkins, the county's extension agent for agriculture, "because dial-up is about the only way they could get it," Perkins said. " ... I'd say 25 to 30 percent would be a good estimate of farmers who have Internet service."

In Muhlenberg County, extension agent Darrell Simpson estimated 25 percent to 30 percent of farmers have Internet service as well. "Most of them have dial-up, so broadband would be wonderful for these guys," Simpson said.

The Governor's Office of Agricultural Policy is hoping to increase the number of farmers with high-speed Internet access through a pilot cost-share program to help farmers pay for the cost of satellite broadband.

"Kentucky farmers had the least access to the Internet of any other state," said Keith Rogers, executive director of the agricultural policy office. "We've been looking ... at how to bridge that gap."

Satellite broadband should be capable of reaching remote corners that are otherwise inaccessible to cable or wireless systems. "Over the last six months, we've watched the

satellite broadband come, in my opinion, into reason," Rogers said.

"We feel the technology has taken a really big jump."

The program will cover 50 percent of the cost of equipment installation for satellite broadband, up to \$250 per farmer. The program will also pay 50 percent of a farmer's monthly satellite broadband bill for one year, up to \$40 per month.

Money for the program will come from the counties' share of the Agricultural Development Fund. The fund was created by the General Assembly, with settlement money from tobacco companies, to help tobacco-dependent farmers diversify their operations.

The pilot program has a similar goal as ConnectKentucky, an agency working to expand rural broadband coverage. Gov. Ernie Fletcher has set a goal to have the entire state broadband accessible by the end of 2007.

"For those who will not be able to access broadband by cable or wireless, this is the next step," Rogers said.

Brian Mefford, president and CEO of ConnectKentucky, said satellite broadband is a viable way of expanding Internet service to remote areas.

"This is a new flavor, if you will," Mefford said. "This new technology has really overcome pretty much all of the former shortcomings of satellite broadband, specifically the speed issue."

Mefford said about 90 percent of the state will have broadband coverage by the end of the year. The pilot program through the Ag Policy office "is really critical in meeting, in 2007, that final 10 percent," Mefford said.

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